

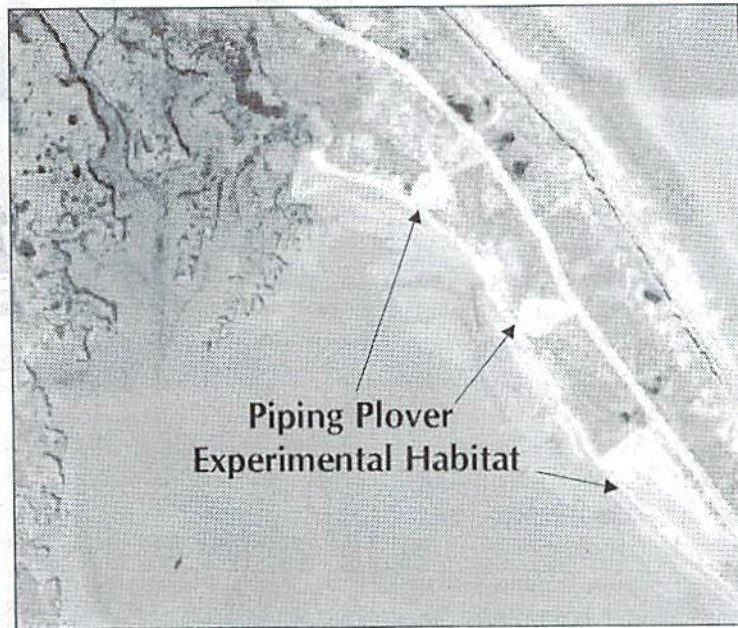
Wednesday, February 26, 2003

Beach Reservation Report

The Duxbury Beach Reservation, better known for planting beach grass, plans to restore its replicated bird habitat areas by clearing them of grass. These artificial habitat areas have filled in with grass naturally, over the last couple of years. The work will be done in the next few weeks so that the areas have a chance to naturalize before the arrival of the birds.

The Reservation has been experimenting with artificial habitat creation for the last few years in an effort to entice piping plovers and least terns to nest on safer parts of the beach. These threatened species prefer flat, unvegetated sites such as the "washover fans" that are produced naturally when storms push sand landward from the beach and dunes over the marshes and into the bay. By 1999, the relatively calm winters had resulted in a significant reduction of acceptable habitat, causing the birds to nest on the front beach where many eggs were lost to high tides and storm waves.

With the approval of the Duxbury Conservation Commission, the State



Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Reservation placed 1700 cubic yards of sand on the back beach south of High Pines to form a rectangle 150 feet by 300 feet. The first plover nest found in Massachusetts in 1999 was on this replicated habitat area.

Encouraged, the Reservation created four more replicated habitat areas in the next two years, drawing several pairs of plovers to nest on the back beach. No new habitat areas were created in 2002,

and the five existing areas had filled in with grass. No plovers nested on any replicated habitat in 2002.

The Reservation wants to restore the five areas to usefulness by removing grass. The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program staff has suggested three possible methods: scraping with a small bulldozer, rototilling, or burning the grass. Whatever method or methods are chosen, the Reservation will seek approval from local, state, and federal permitting agencies prior to the habitat restoration.